

## 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

***“We do not belong to the night or to darkness.”***

1 Thessalonians 5, 1-6

***“For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will grow rich; but from the ones who have not, even what they have will be taken away.”***



Matthew 25, 14-30

Today's gospel is the parable of the talents. In it, Matthew describes how he imagines God will react to people on judgement day. Matthew depicts God as something of a business tycoon who likes making more money. As he goes off on a trip away, he hands over responsibility for his business to his managers with the expectation that they will make his money work for him. Apparently he's been pretty successful at playing the stock-market and he obviously expects those he leaves in charge to take a leaf out of his own book. If not, they haven't really grasped his style. That's why he roundly condemns the manager who has been too conservative and over-cautious.

To explain this parable simply in terms of developing and sharing one's talents is to ignore its spirit. While it's true that the parable confronts us with questions as to the extent to which we put our brains and brawn, our creativity and our skills towards the building up of God's kingdom, it also presents us with an invitation to engage with God in a joint enterprise which calls for daring, a modicum of good fortune and a deal of mutual trust. It's very clear from the reactions of the entrepreneur in the parable that he wanted his managers to be daring and to take calculated risks with his money when they invested it.

It's in this context, then, that we are challenged to consider how we use our talents. And the clear indication is that it should go beyond acting out of a sense of duty and strict accountability. There is an imaginative edge to it. God wants to capitalise on our talents in order to bring about good in our world. God also trusts that we will use our talents creatively and imaginatively to contribute in our own distinctive way to the good of our world. God does God's thing and hopes and expects that we will do our thing for the betterment of humanity. It does not require too much reflection to realize that the relationship we have with God is built on trust. It follows that such a relationship is lived out with authenticity to the extent that we take initiatives and give expression to our imagination. God surely does not want us to be crippled with caution and live out our lives unable and unwilling to dare. That is the way to social isolation and impoverishment of spirit. Having loved us into life, God surely wants us to live with trust and daring, with imagination, creativity and hope. Whatever the talents with which we are entrusted, they will suffocate unless we exercise them imaginatively, with trust and hope in God.

If the only picture we have of God is that of monitor of our talents and assessor of how we use them, we are failing to live with the freedom with which God has blessed us. It's, therefore, sad to come across people who either believe that they have no talents or who lament that they have not used to capacity the talents with which they have been endowed. They would surely take little comfort from Paul's comment in today's second reading that the Lord will come "like a thief in the night." We have to be convinced that God is not vindictive and is surely not coming back to rob us of anything. Jesus invites us to place our complete trust in him. His life on earth was marked by complete openness and honesty. That is how he will remain, even at the end of time.

It seems to me that those who chose the readings for today's liturgy meant the first reading from Proverbs to be an illustration of a woman who had used her talents to the full. The picture of the "ideal wife" surely belongs to its time in that it is a touch chauvinistic and seems to suggest that this woman's worth is based on what she is able to accomplish. However, the writer begins his description of the "ideal wife" by pointing to the relationship of trust and confidence that exists between her and her husband: "Her husband puts his confidence in her and trusts her without reserve." (Proverbs 31, 11) That's the attitude which the entrepreneur in the parable has towards his managers, and it's the same attitude that God adopts in dealing with us. A relationship of trust enables talents to flourish. That's true in the workplace and it's true in the relationship between ourselves and God.

Let me conclude this reflection with a piece which a friend in the U.S. sent me just a few weeks ago. It's a story which appeared in the Boston Globe.

## **Life in the Garden**

September 23, 2011 By Joan Wickersham, Globe Columnist

DRIVING HOME from Boston on the afternoon of May 5, Ron and Cindy didn't talk much. There wasn't much to say. A team of doctors had just told them that Ron's oesophageal cancer - diagnosed only days before - was inoperable. No cure. No hope of long-term survival. With radiation and chemo, Ron might have nine months to a year.

They'd been together since high school. He was only 60. They'd been looking forward to retirement, maybe to travelling a little, to the birth of their second grandchild. Now suddenly they were figuring out what they wanted to do over the next nine months to a year. "I'd like to have a garden," Ron said.

Cindy was surprised - he'd never grown anything, never expressed the slightest interest in gardening. "That would be nice," she said vaguely, imagining a couple of tomato plants.

Four days later, she came home from work to find the yard filled with men, boards, dirt, a Bobcat, and a 20-by-30-foot raised garden. Ron, who had

recently marked his 29th year of sobriety, had mentioned at an AA meeting that he wanted a garden, and his friends had showed up to build him one.

He was sitting in a chair, watching, talking, laughing. There was no last-wish solemnity about the scene; Cindy was struck by how happy and relaxed they all seemed. Ron tried to pay for the materials; the guys wouldn't let him. Cindy kept thanking them, telling them how amazing they were. When they left, she turned to Ron. "Have we met? You don't garden. I don't garden. This thing is gigantic - what the hell are we going to do with it?"

"I think it will bring people together," he said.

Over the next days he was able to sit by the garden sometimes, but soon pain and exhaustion kept him in bed. "Nine months is optimistic," the radiologist said.

Friends stopped by; they didn't want to tire Ron, or tax Cindy too much by asking for details of how he was - it was clear how he was - so they worked in the garden. They planted seeds and seedlings. Cindy's brother installed a sprinkler system. Neighbours planted corn. Ron and Cindy's 8-year-old grandson made a path, using leftover flagstones he found lying around the yard. Visitors came, didn't know what to say, and weeded.

Ron died on June 7. After the funeral people went back to the house and wandered out to look at the garden. Ron and Cindy's grandson ran around handing out radishes, strawberries and lettuce leaves. Men in suits were hoeing, and staking tomato plants.

In retelling this story, you will surely discover how it is connected to today's parable.